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The Neceſſary and Immutable DIFFERENCE *between* MORAL GOOD *and* EVIL, *aſſerted and explained,*

IN A

SERMON

PREACHED to the

SOCIETIES

FOR

Reformation of Manners,

AT

SALTERS HALL,

SEPTEMBER the 25th. 1738.

By SAMUEL CHANDLER.

Publiſhed at the REQUEST *of the* Societies.

Communis intelligentia nobis notas Res efficit, eaſque in animis noſtris inchoavit, ut honeſta in Virtute ponantur, in vitiis turpia. Hæc autem in Opinione exiſtimare, non in Natura poſita, dementis eſt.

CICER. *de leg.* l. 1. c. 16.

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ISAIAH v. 20.

Wo unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darkneſs for Light, and Light for Darkneſs; that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.

THERE can be no ſtronger Argument, or ſurer Evidence of an univerſal and intire Corruption of Mankind, than their confounding the Natures of moral Good and Evil, and paying no Regard to the eternal and immutable Diſtinction between Virtue and Vice. This muſt proceed not from any *natural Incapacity* to diſcern the eſſential Difference between theſe Things, but either from a ſhameleſs Obſtinacy and Impudence in Vice, or elſe from a Mind and Conſcience abſolutely perverted and blinded by criminal Indulgences and ſinful Paſſions.

God's ancient People, the *Jews*, had the ſame common Light of Nature and Reaſon to guide them, which all other Nations had; and beſides this, were favoured with a Syſtem of excellent Laws given them by *Moſes* their Lawgiver, under

the Direction of *Jehovah* himself, who formed them into a Republick: Laws which supposed, and were *generally* founded upon this eternal and immutable Difference. Under such Advantages, one would not easily imagine, that they should degenerate into such Stupidity and Wickedness, as to lose all Sense of what their own Reason, and the Law of God so plainly and strongly dictated to them. But 'tis the too common and fatal Effect of Obstinacy in Vice, that it not only captivates and enslaves Men, but darkens their Understandings, hardens their Consciences, and corrupts their Judgments; even so far, as that it oftentimes almost extinguishes their natural Sense of Things, and renders them incapable of clearly discerning the Evidence and Certainty of the most obvious and important Truths.

This was the Case of many amongst the *Jews*. They had fallen into the most criminal Excesses, and abandoned themselves to the worst of Sins, till by degrees they grew so intirely corrupted, as either to lose all manner of Apprehension of the Difference between Moral Good and Evil, or at least to endeavour to defend themselves and others in their Impieties and Vices, by pretending to reason and argue that there was none. This is what God threatens them for with the severest Punishment, in the Words of my Text: *Wo unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness; that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter.* These Things, though of different Natures, are here joined together, to denote, that the Difference of Nature and Consequences between Moral Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice, is as certain and real, as that between any natural and sensible Objects whatsoever; and that it may be as easily discerned by the Minds of Men as the Distinction between *Light and Darkness*

is by the bodily Eye; and that it argues as great Perverſeneſs to diſpute or deny it, as it would be to diſpute or deny the Difference between *Bitter and Sweet*, or between the moſt contrary and oppoſite Reliſhes of the Palate whatſoever: So that theſe Words inform us,

I. That the Difference between moral Good and Evil, is certain, neceſſary, and immutable.
II. That this Difference is as eaſily and clearly to be diſcerned, as the Difference between any natural and ſenſible Objects whatſoever.
III. That the confounding or habitually diſregarding this eſſential and immutable Difference will be attended with the moſt pernicious and deſtructive Conſequences.

I. Theſe Words inform us, that there is *as certain* and immutable a Difference between *moral Good and Evil*, Virtue and Vice, as there is between *Darkneſs and Light*, and *Bitter and Sweet*; a Difference *not accidental* to, but founded *in the Nature* of the Things themſelves; not merely *the Reſult of* the Determination and arbitrary *Will* of another, but which the *very* Ideas of the Things themſelves do really and neceſſarily include. That a Circle is not a Square, nor a Square a Triangle; but that they are eſſentially different Figures, and have diſtinct Affections and Properties, and that they do not convey the ſame or ſimilar Ideas, is obvious to every Man who hath Eyes to behold them, and an Underſtanding to diſcern the Attributes that are peculiar to them. In like Manner, Piety to God, Gratitude for Benefits received, Juſtice and Charity, Temperance and Chaſtity, and the like Virtues, are as eſſentially diſtinct from, and do convey as oppoſite and different

Ideas

Ideas to Impiety, Ingratitude, Injuſtice, Uncharitableneſs, Intemperance, Luſt, and the like Vices; ſo that it is abſolutely impoſſible they can *form the ſame Ideas*, or raiſe the ſame Sentiments or Apprehenſions in our Breaſts: And though Men may diſregard theſe intrinſick and neceſſary Differences in their Practices, through the Warmth of Paſſion, or the powerful Influence of corrupt Habits; yet they can no more deſtroy them, nor actually reconcile, and make the Ideas of them to *coincide*, and become indiviſibly the ſame, than they can unite the two Extremes of Heaven, or make the two oppoſite Senſations of *Light and Darkneſs*, *Sweet and Bitter*, Cold and Heat, to become abſolutely the ſame.

Hence it follows, That if moral Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice, are naturally and *eſſentially different*, and do convey abſolutely diſtinct and even oppoſite Ideas; this Difference is ſtrictly and *properly eternal*, i. e. It was as true, from all Eternity, that Light could not be the ſame Thing as Darkneſs, nor Darkneſs as Light; that Virtue could not be the ſame Thing as Vice, nor Vice as Virtue; or that theſe Things could not convey one and the ſame Idea, as it can be true that they do not now. And ſuppoſing the eternal and immutable Exiſtence of God, the Ideas of theſe Things, muſt have been the ſame in his all perfect Mind from Eternity, as they now are, and have appeared to his Underſtanding with the ſame Oppoſition and Contrariety of Nature to each other as they do now. This is evident from the very Notion of the divine Knowledge; which conſiſts, not in having an infinite Number of confuſed, diſorder'd, and unconnected Ideas, but in diſcerning the *very Nature* of Things, ſeeing them *as they* really and *truly are*, and in perceiving their reſpective Relations and Connections, their neceſ-

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ſary and unalterable Oppoſitions and Repugnancies, together with all the Conſequences that may poſſibly or certainly flow from theſe their *Habitudes* to each other. To conceive Things otherwiſe than they really are, is not Knowledge, but the want of it. 'Tis Ignorance and Error; and therefore God cannot conceive moral or natural Good to be moral or natural Evil; becauſe this would be to conceive Things otherwiſe than they really are; and of conſequence the Diſtinction between moral Good and Evil is as eternal as the Knowledge of God himſelf, *i. e.* ſtrictly and abſolutely eternal.

Hence it farther follows, that this Difference between moral Good and Evil, is *abſolutely immutable*, and incapable of any poſſible Alteration. Whilſt the Nature of theſe Things remains what it is, they muſt ever be the ſame *in the Perceptions* of the divine Mind; and as the Difference between them is eſſential, neceſſary, and ſtrictly eternal, that Difference muſt remain neceſſarily and eternally, *i. e.* immutably the ſame; and therefore the Mind or Will of God cannot be ſuppoſed capable of altering their Natures; becauſe it implies an abſolute Impoſſibility, and becauſe Impoſſibilities are *no Objects* of Power: And therefore if God could be ſuppoſed capable of *willing* ſuch an Alteration, it muſt be a Will *without Influence* or Efficacy.

God may indeed bring into *actual Exiſtence* a great Variety of Creatures, with very *different Powers*, Faculties, and Relations to each others; and who, in Conſequence hereof, may be under Obligations to diſcharge Duties of very *different Kinds* and Natures: Or God *may alter* the Nature of the very Beings themſelves, which now exiſt. He may *lower* Angels to the State of Man; he may *exalt* Men into the Condition of Angels, or

degrade

degrade them into Brutes or Stones; or *raiſe up out of Stones Children for himſelf.* In all theſe Caſes, as the Nature and Circumſtances of external Beings, *actually exiſting*, may vary, ſo muſt their Relations too; and of conſequence the *Duties* reſulting from theſe different States, Characters, and Relations, *will vary* as the Nature and Relations of the Beings themſelves do. But *the Nature* of moral Good and Evil, in their whole Extent, and in their Relation to every Claſs of reaſonable Beings, doth not in the leaſt depend upon their actual Exiſtence.

Before ever any created Being received its Exiſtence, God had, within himſelf, the Ideas of all poſſible Futurities, of the Nature of all Beings that ſhould afterwards have Life, of their ſeveral Relations to himſelf, and one another; and ſaw what Fitneſſes, Obligations and Duties would and muſt reſult from, and belong to Creatures thus formed and conſtituted. Without this he could never have created them at all. He ſaw it abſolutely and eſſentially fit, that all Beings, created with reaſonable Powers, ſhould own and acknowledge their Dependance on, and Obligations to himſelf, their great Former and Father; conſult the Preſervation and Welfare of their own Natures, and according to their reſpective Abilities and Opportunities, promote each others Happineſs, and govern all their Actions ſo as ſhould moſt effectually conduce to theſe excellent Purpoſes. God ſaw theſe Fitneſſes as certainly and as clearly, when as yet his Creatures had no Being, as he could do after their actual Exiſtence: And therefore, as the Ideas of ſuch Beings and ſuch Relations do neceſſarily infer theſe conſequent Fitneſſes ariſing out of, and not any ways accidental to the Things themſelves, even antecedent to the actual Exiſtence of ſuch Beings, the Fitneſſes reſulting from ſuch Relati-

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ons, when actually taking Place, must be absolutely unalterable.

Nor is it in any Manner derogating from the Power of God to affirm, That he himself is not capable of altering or confounding the Nature of these Things. No Person of Reflection and Candor would scruple to affirm, That God cannot make the Doctrine of *Transubstantiation* to be true, *i. e.* that God cannot make *a Wafer* of Bread, to be *God himself*, whilst it retains the Accidents and Properties of a Wafer; nor the one single *individual Body* of Christ, to be really and actually present *in ten thousand* Places at once; nor his Body to be whole, unbroken, and uneaten at the same Time that it is eaten, chew'd, broken and devour'd. Every one that can see at all, may see the infinite Absurdity, and the absolute Impossibility of such Assertions, and immediately discern the most palpable and irreconcilable Contradictions. If therefore God cannot make these Things to be true, because they imply a necessary Contradiction to all Truth; by a Parity of Reason, he cannot do any other Thing which implies as certain and irreconcilable a Contradiction to Truth; consequently he cannot alter the Nature of moral Good and Evil; his Will can never make the one to be the other, because the very Ideas of them imply an essential Opposition to each other, or the Negation or Absence of each other; and therefore, the uniting, reconciling, and making them to be one and the same Thing, involves in it an Impossibility and Absurdity.

Hence we may see the *true Sense* and Meaning of the Expression, which hath been often made Use of on this Subject, *viz.* That the Difference between Moral Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice, is so essential and necessary, as to be *intirely independent on the Will of God.* Possibly the Phrase may

ſeem a *little harſh*, at firſt View, to Perſons not accuſtomed to reaſon on this Subject. But, as I apprehend it juſt, ſo I hope you will be fully reconciled to it, when explained with proper Care and Caution. When therefore 'tis aſſerted, That the Difference between moral Good and Evil, *is independent on the Will* of God; the Meaning is not, that the Mind of God had not, from all Eternity, a full Diſcernment of this Diſtinction, or that there ever was any Period of Duration, when the Idea of this Difference was not preſent to his all perfect Mind; or that God ever did not, or could not, will that his reaſonable Creatures, when exiſting, ſhould guide their Actions according to it; or that the Will of God, injoyning moral Virtue, and forbidding moral Evil, doth not carry in it a very ſtrong and powerful Obligation upon them to practiſe the one, or forbear the other; or, that God could not have formed Beings with different Powers and Relations, if he had ſo willed, and by conſequence under very different Obligations from what they now are; or, that the Exiſtence of the Creatures that now are, and their reſpective Obligations actually taking place, is not to be reſolved into the Will and Pleaſure of God. No; none of theſe Things are implied in this Aſſertion. The true and only Meaning of it is, That the Diſtinction between moral Good and Evil doth ſo ariſe out of the Nature of the Things themſelves, as not to be originally and properly the mere Effect of the divine Order and Will, ſo as that it never would have been, had not God willed and commanded it to be; but that this Difference did originally and eternally ſubſiſt in the Mind of God, as certainly as the Difference between Light and Darkneſs, and was, in Idea, ever preſent with him, before ever it became the Law of his Creatures, and appeared to them as the Matter of his

Command and Will; and is it ſelf that neceſſary, invariable, and eternal Rule by which God himſelf regulates and determines his own Will and Conduct to his Creatures; and which therefore, as a Rule of Action to himſelf, muſt be ſuppoſed to be independent of, and prior to, not the Exiſtence of God, which is abſolutely Eternal, but to the Will of the eternal God, and to be indeed the great Reaſon and Meaſure of all his Actions towards his Creatures. And indeed, nothing appears to me with greater Evidence, Certainty and Clearneſs, than that, if the Ideas of all Truth ſubſiſted eternally in the Mind of God, Truth in its Original and Nature, can, in no Senſe, be the Creature of Power, or the mere Effect of arbitrary Pleaſure; but ſtrictly coeternal with God himſelf; and thus far, as intirely independent of his Order or Will, as his own Being, Perfection and Happineſs.

And, I apprehend, that this Difference of Things, ariſing out of their very Natures, is not only true, but a Truth of the utmoſt Importance, for ſettling and aſcertaining the proper Foundation of moral Good and Evil; yea, of ſuch Importance, that we cannot even form any true Conceptions of the Perfections and Attributes of God without it. For Inſtance; when we ſay that God doth *neceſſarily exiſt*; doth not this ſuppoſe a natural and fixed Difference between *neceſſary* and *precarious Exiſtence*, eternal as the Being of God, and abſolutely independent on his Will; becauſe, was the Exiſtence of God dependent on his Will, it would directly deſtroy the Notion of its being neceſſary? In like Manner, when we ſay, that God is *Eternal*, *Immenſe*, *Intelligent*, *All-powerful*, and the like, we mean, that God is not *a temporary*, *limited*, *unconſcious*, *impotent Being*; and by conſequence do ſuppoſe, that the Diſtinctions between Eternity and Time, Im-

menſity and Limitedneſs, Intelligence and Unconſciouſneſs, Power and Weakneſs, are not arbitrary, and owing merely to the Will of God, but as neceſſary and eternal as the Being of God himſelf; becauſe, without the Perfections I have mentioned, we can have no poſſible Conceptions of God, nor any poſſible Conception of theſe Perfections, without including in it an abſolute Negation of their Contraries and Oppoſites.

In like Manner, with reſpect to God's moral Perfections, when we ſay, That God is *Wiſe, and Juſt, and Good*, and eternally and unalterably ſo, we mean, at leaſt, that God is not a *fooliſh, unrighteous, evil and cruel* Being; and therefore muſt ſuppoſe, that the Difference between Wiſdom and Folly, Juſtice and Injuſtice, Evil and Good, Cruelty and Mercy, is abſolutely eternal and unalterable as God himſelf, of whom we affirm the one, and deny the other, and therefore is not owing to his willing that it ſhould be ſo, nor alterable at his Pleaſure, nor dependent on him for its continuance. For if the Diſtinction between theſe *moral Entities*, or Objects, was merely arbitrary, and originally the Reſult *only* of the Will of God, it can never be affirmed of him, that he is eternally and immutably the one, and not the other: For upon this Suppoſition he *was not Wiſe*, or Juſt, or Good, till *be willed* to be ſo; and might have been fooliſh, unjuſt, and evil, by a like Determination of his Will, if there be no eſſential, immutable Difference in the Things themſelves: Nor can there be any poſſible Certainty of God's continuing, for the Future, to be Wiſe, and Juſt, and Good, and not the contrary. For if there be no other Difference between the one and the other, but what the Will of God hath conſtituted, that Will ceaſing, or altering, theſe Diſtinctions, in conſequence, muſt ceaſe or alter, and God

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may be evil instead of good, or rather good and evil at the same Time, which is an evident Absurdity and Contradiction.

So that I apprehend it plainly appears, that the very Notion of God implies the Necessary, Essential, Eternal, Immutable, and Independent Difference between Moral Good and Evil: And indeed without this Supposition we could have no sure and fixed Rule of Action our selves as reasonable Creatures. For if Piety, Justice, Charity, and the like Virtues, are the Creatures of mere Power, and the precarious Effects of absolute Will and Pleasure; [a] Power and Will may immediately alter them, cancel Mens Obligations to regard them, and substitute in the Room of them Impiety, Injustice, and Cruelty, as the great Obligations and Duties of human Nature. Nor can there be, upon this Supposition, any one substantial Reason alledged, why such a Change should not take place. For if there be no essential and immutable Distinction between these Things, arising out of their very Natures; if some of them are not originally and unalterably Good, and others not originally and unalterably Evil; absolute Power and Will can have no certain and fixed Rule and Reason to pass any Determination concerning them, but must act upon the most lawless, unstable, and capricious Foundation possible.

To urge here that the Will of God *will be certainly* and immutably *rightly determined*, and that therefore we may be sure he will *always will* that which is fit and good, is to say; either that God makes the intrinsick Difference of Things the Rule of his Determinations, and the Measure of his Will; which is to affirm, that this Difference is in the Things themselves, and therefore antecedent to, and independent of his Will, which is what I am argu-

[a] *Vid.* Cicer. de legib. l. 1. c. 16.

arguing for: Or elſe, that God will immutably determine that which is Juſt and Good, though Juſtice and Goodneſs have no certain and neceſſary Foundation in Nature, and therefore have no neceſſary Excellency and Perfection in them; but are mere indifferent, arbitrary Things, ſet up by Power, and to be deſtroyed by Power at pleaſure; reaſonable and fit only during the Pleaſure of him that conſtitutes them ſo, and unreaſonable and unfit upon the Change of his Will, and the contrary Determination of it. The Conſequence of which is, that there can be no poſſible Certainty that God ſhall always will that which is now Good, in oppoſition to what is now called Evil, but the one or the other, as Caprice or Humour ſhall direct him; which immediately becomes either Good or Evil, and on the contrary Evil or Good, for no other Reaſon, but becauſe he *without Reaſon* wills them to be ſo. According to which Scheme the Foundations of Religion and Moral Virtue muſt be as precarious as that Will, which hath no eſſential Difference of Things, nor any fixed Rule of Truth and Reaſon to influence and determine it.

Having thus eſtabliſhed, and I think demonſtrated the neceſſary and unalterable Difference between Moral Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice, I proceed farther to obſerve: That there are certain *original and unalterable Fitneſſes and Unfitneſſes* which do ariſe from theſe eternal and immutable Diſtinctions, as neceſſary and unchangeable as the Diſtinctions themſelves; which Fitneſſes or Unfitneſſes were eternally preſent to the all-comprehenſive Mind of God, and as clearly diſcerned by him as the natural Differences of the Things themſelves from whence they flow, *i. e.* in other Words: Suppoſing the Exiſtence of reaſonable Beings, it is immutably reaſonable and fit that they ſhould regard and practiſe that Syſtem of Moral Virtue, which

which belongs to their Natures and respective Characters, and abstain from the contrary Moral Evil.

Moral Good and Evil are, I think, a kind of *relative Terms*, i. e. they do suppose either *in Idea* or *actual Existence* certain reasonable Beings, and certain Relations in which they stand to each other. Before ever the Creation was formed, God was in and from himself possessed of infinite Perfection, of all that Power and Wisdom, which could not but exert themselves in all Acts of Justice and Goodness to his Creatures, after their being brought into actual Existence; the original Fitness of which Conduct towards them was clearly discerned by God, whilst they were yet only present in Idea to his Mind, and arose from those apprehended Relations which were actually in Time to subsist between God and them. And as God had nothing to determine him in the Formation of the World, but the Direction of his own infinite Understanding and Wisdom, he was undoubtedly at liberty to form what Systems of Beings he thought proper. He might have formed other Creatures than what he hath, or produced some or all of those which now exist, in a different Manner from what he actually hath done. He might, for Instance, have stocked our Earth with Inhabitants at once, and formed them in the same Manner as he did our first Parents. And of Consequence, as the present Frame of Things is owing to the Wisdom, the good Pleasure and Will of God, so the Fitnesses of Things which now actually take place, and that particular System of Moral Virtue which Mankind are obliged to regard and conform themselves to, must, as far as 'tis a Constitution of Things *actually existing*, be resolved into the same good Pleasure and Will of God; because those Relations of Mankind to each other, from whence their peculiar moral Obligations flow, are solely of his Appointment and Forming. When

When indeed God had actually given Being to reasonable Creatures, of such particular Capacities and Circumstances, their Relations to each other, and the Fitnesses and Obligations resulting from them became certain and necessary. When he determined that the Race of Mankind should be propagated in the Manner it now is, he determined that the Relations of Parents and Children should actually take place, and that therefore those particular Fitnesses and Obligations, that Parents should take care of their Children, and that Children should be dutiful and grateful to their Parents, should be the certain and immutable Law of their Nature and Condition; and when these Relations once actually subsisted, the Fitnesses of those Duties necessarily resulted from them, and were no longer dependent on the Will of God, whether they should carry in them any reasonable Obligation or not; and when they become the Matter of an immediate divine Command, they were not therefore reasonable *only because* commanded, but commanded because naturally, and antecedently reasonable. But if God had pleased to form the whole Race of Mankind at once, as there would not then have actually existed amongst them the Relations of Parents and Children, parental Tenderness and filial Gratitude would not have been Things fitting in such a State, could not have been the Matter of a divine Command to them, and therefore could have laid them under no Obligation, either in Reason or from Authority. So that as the present Frame of the World, and the Relations that actually subsist amongst Mankind, are oweing to the sovereign Wisdom and Pleasure of the great Creator, though it was eternally and immutably true, that such Relations when ever existing, would certainly infer such Fitnesses and Obligations in Reason, yet that the present System of Morali-

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ty doth now actually take Place amongſt us, is intirely owing to the ſame Wiſdom and Pleaſure of God; but is not alterable by the Will of God, whilſt the preſent Frame of Things, and the Relations that now ſubſiſt amongſt Mankind, continue to remain what they now are.

And the Reaſon of this is evident, becauſe the Fitneſs and Unfitneſs of Moral Good and Evil are as neceſſary and certain, as the natural and original Difference between them. For Inſtance, Moral Virtue conſiſts, either in *the right Diſpoſition* of a reaſonable Being's *Mind*, or in *his right Behaviour* towards other Beings, to whom he bears ſuch peculiar Relations. The Fitneſs therefore of Moral Virtue ariſes from the certain Connexion there is between a Being *ſo circumſtanced*, and *ſuch a particular Diſpoſition* as is correſpondent to his Nature and Circumſtances; and between *the diſtinguiſhing Relations* he ſuſtains to other Beings, and *ſuch a Behaviour* as is anſwerable to thoſe Relations. If I have Powers and Faculties which render me capable of Conſideration and Reflection, it is an Inſtance or Duty of Moral Virtue, that I ſhould employ my Powers and Faculties for this End and Purpoſe; and the Fitneſs of this Inſtance of Moral Virtue conſiſts in this, *viz.* in the certain and evident Relation that the having reaſonable Powers bears to the regular and proper Uſe of them. If I am a Creature derived and dependent, Gratitude, and Love, and Praiſe to the great Author of my Being, are alſo Inſtances of like Moral Virtue; and the Fitneſs and Reaſonableneſs of theſe Moral Duties ariſe from the neceſſary Relations of Creator and Creature, the Connexion between Benefits conferred, and Benefits received, the Reception of Benefits, and the proper Acknowledgment of them by thoſe who have them. If there be any Perſon whom God hath appointed as the Saviour of Man-

kind from Ignorance, Vice, and Misery; to instruct, reform, and govern them, and bring them to a State of Perfection and Happiness; and if this Person hath by his Example, Doctrines, Sufferings, Death, and Resurrection, done every Thing that is necessary and fit to answer these Purposes of the Wisdom and Mercy of God; the necessary Consequence is, that Submission to him in all his Characters, and a thankful Acknowledgment of his Benefits, are also Things essentially fit in themselves, and necessary Instances of Moral Virtue; Things as eternally and immutably fit, as any other Branches of Moral Virtue that can be named, because there is an original, necessary, unalterable Relation between such Characters and Benefits conferred, and such a Submission to and Acknowledgment of him. And as there is no one Duty relating to our blessed Saviour, which the Gospel Revelation injoins us, but what necessarily results from some Character or Relation, that he bears to us; those Duties will appear to be, in the strictest Sense, of Moral Obligation, and amongst the eternal and unalterable Fitnesses of Things. The same might be demonstrated of all other Instances of Virtue that are properly moral, that there is a real Proportion and immutable Fitness and Correspondence between them and the Relations and Characters to which they belong; the unavoidable Consequence of which is, that Moral Evil or Vice must be naturally, absolutely, in it self, and therefore always unreasonable and unfit; because there is no Relation and natural Connexion, but an original and immutable Disproportion, Opposition and Contradiction between the Disposition and Behaviour that Vice implies, and the acknowledged Relations and Characters of Mankind. The having reasonable Powers can have no possible Relation to, or natural Connexion with the Neglect or the

Abuſe of them; nor an Oppoſition to the Government of God and proving ungrateful to him, ever be ſhewn to be the proper Reſult or reaſonable Conſequence of having received Being, and the Supports of it from his Goodneſs; but on the contrary appear at firſt View to imply an Abſurdity and Contradiction.

As therefore the Difference between Moral Good and Evil, and the Fitneſſes and Unfitneſſes which reſult from them, is certain in it ſelf, and immutable in its Nature, I would farther obſerve, that this is *the ſupream*, and original, and *univerſal Rule of Action* to all reaſonable Beings whatſoever. It is the one certain and *unerring Rule of God* himſelf, who as he hath no Superior, can receive Laws from none, nor have any external Power to oblige and conſtrain him. But that he hath a Reaſon and Rule of Action within himſelf, is *as evident* as that he ever acts at all, and *as certain*, as that he will always act wiſely and well. Now this Rule of Action to the divine Being, I think we can conceive to be nothing elſe but his all comprehenſive Knowledge, or his perfect Conception of the Natures of all Things, the Relations which the ſeveral Beings he hath formed ſtand in to himſelf, and to one another, the Fitneſſes and Unfitneſſes which belong to them, the Meaſure and Degree of their Powers and Faculties, and all the ſeveral Circumſtances of their Beings. Having this full Perception of all Things he can never be at a Loſs how to act, nor poſſibly do amiſs *through Error* and Miſtake; being poſſeſſed of infinite Power he can never act wrong, *through Impotence* and Weakneſs; having no Being ſuperior to himſelf, he can never receive Law from another, nor act contrary to the moral Fitneſs of Things *through Force* and Conſtraint; having no irregular Paſſions, Affections, and Inclinations, he can never be perverted, and

biaſſed from within himſelf, to an unreaſonable and unbecoming Conduct. In a Word, being abſolutely free from every external Conſtraint, and internal Defect, his Power can have no other Guide, nor his Will have any Thing elſe to determine it, but his own infinite Underſtanding and Wiſdom. And as he diſcerns all Things as they really are, his Will muſt ever be determined rightly, according to the immutable Natures and eternal Differences of Things themſelves, and the reſpective Natures, Conditions and Circumſtances of the ſeveral Creatures which he hath formed.

The Conſequence of which is, that what is the invariable and *eternal Rule* of the divine Conduct, muſt be *the ſupream*, and moſt perfect *Rule* of Action to all reaſonable Beings whatſoever; becauſe it is impoſſible that there can be any Rule of Action *more excellent* in it ſelf, or more worthy the Regard of reaſonable Beings, than that which the Uncreated and All-perfect God makes the Meaſure and Standard of his own Conduct; I mean the immutable Differences of Things, and the Fitneſſes and Unfitneſſes which neceſſarily reſult from them. Such is the Perfection of the divine Nature, that as God can have no other Rule of Action but this, ſo he needs none; and as to all created Beings, the more invariably they act by it, ſo much the more perfect and compleat is their Virtue and Goodneſs. As they are indeed the Workmanſhip of the firſt Cauſe, as their particular Powers, Perfections and Relations, are the Effects of his Power and Conſtitution, all thoſe Fitneſſes and Duties which flow from them are to be looked on and regarded as inforced and injoined by his Authority and Will; it being as evidently the Will of the great Creator that we ſhould perform all thoſe Duties of Moral Virtue which are the Reſult of, and neceſſarily connected with our Nature and Relations, as it

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was that we ſhould be the particular Kind of Creatures that we are. And therefore *the Will* of God is a real and *immutable Obligation* upon us, to which we ſhould always pay the higheſt Deference and Submiſſion. But even this comes under the general Notion of the original Fitneſſes of Things, and is not an Obligation of a diſtinct Nature and Kind from them; becauſe, if any one was to be aſked, Why the Will of God ſhould be obeyed? he could give, I apprehend, no other rational Anſwer, but that it is eternally and immutably fit, that all Creatures ſhould obey the Will of their Creator and God. Not that *mere Power* carries in it, *of it ſelf*, any proper, reaſonable Obligation; or, that *the arbitrary Will* of another is, *without other Conſiderations*, a Reaſon for ſubmitting to it. No; 'Tis abſolutely fit that God's Will ſhould be obey'd; becauſe he hath a ſovereign and unalienable Right in his Creatures, and will not command any Thing that is unreaſonable and unfit for them to do. And therefore, though the Will of God be a Reaſon and certain Rule of Action to all his Creatures, yet is it not any Thing diſtinct from the everlaſting Fitneſſes of Things, but included in them, and indeed a neceſſary and eſſential Branch of them.

I would only farther add on this Head, That this Notion of the immutable and eternal Obligation of Moral Virtue, is not one of *the peculiar Diſcoveries* of the Reaſon and good Senſe of the preſent Age, but is plainly taught both in the Records of the *Old* and *New Teſtament*. On this Account the Pſalmiſt ſpeaking of the Moral Part of the *Jewiſh* Law, ſays; [a] *Thy Righteouſneſs is an everlaſting Righteouſneſs, and thy Law is Truth:* [b] *The Righteouſneſs of thy Teſtimonies is everlaſting.* Con-

[a] Pſal. cxix. 142. [b] Ver. 144.

[c] *Concerning thy Teſtimonies I have known of old that thou haſt founded them for ever.* Or, as the Words ſhould be render'd: *I have known of old,* מעדותיך *from thy Teſtimonies, that thou haſt founded them for ever.* I have long ſince been convinced, from the Nature and intrinſick Goodneſs of them, that they are of eternal and immutable Obligation. And again; [d] *Thy Word is true from the Beginning; and every one of thy righteous Judgments is for ever.* Theſe are Expreſſions evidently relating to the eternal and immutable Nature of the Moral Law of God. Upon the ſame Foundation is St. *Paul*'s Advice to the *Philippians*; [e] *Whatſoever Things are true, whatſoever Things are honeſt, whatſoever Things are juſt, whatſoever Things are pure, whatſoever Things are lovely, whatſoever Things are of good Report; if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praiſe, think on theſe Things:* Expreſſions, that neceſſarily ſuppoſe, and infer, that Truth, Honeſty, Juſtice, Purity, and, in a Word, all the real Virtues of human Life [f], are eſſentially different from their contrary Vices; are lovely and amiable in their Nature, reputable and praiſe worthy in their Practice; and which both God and Man will not fail to approve and commend. And this leads me,

II. To the ſecond general Head; which is to ſhew you, that this Difference between Moral Good and Evil, and the Fitneſſes and Unfitneſſes which they neceſſarily infer, is as eaſily and certainly to be diſcerned by Mankind, as the Differences between any natural or ſenſible Objects whatſoever. This, I think, is evidently ſuppoſed in the Words of my Text: *Wo unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darkneſs*

[c] Pſal. cxix. 152. [d] Ver. 160. [e] Chap. iv. 8.
[f] *Vid.* Cicer. de legib. l. 1. c. 16, 17.

neſs for Light, and Light for Darkneſs; that put Bitter for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter. Theſe two latter *natural Contraries* are added by way of Illuſtration of the former; the Prophet not really blaming the *Jews* for *putting Darkneſs for Light, or Bitter for Sweet*, which no Perſons who had the Uſe of their Senſes could do; but for calling *Evil Good, and Good Evil*, endeavouring to confound and alter the Nature of Virtue and Vice; which argued as great Stupidity, or wilful Obſtinacy, as if Men ſhould pretend, and affirm, that Light was Darkneſs, and Sweet Bitter, and the contrary. The Senſes of Men teach them to diſtinguiſh between theſe and the like natural Objects, and neceſſarily prevent them from confounding them. And it is as obvious to the Underſtanding of all Men, which is to the Mind what the Eye is to the Body, that Evil cannot be Good, nor Virtue Vice, whatſoever falſe Methods vicious Men may take to blend them, or how unwilling ſoever they may be to attend to theſe certain unchangeable Diſtinctions in their Practice.

There are ſome Things ſo perfectly plain and *ſelf-evident*, as that they neither need, nor are capable of Demonſtration. They are ſo obvious to the Mind, as ſoon as propoſed, as not to admit of any Medium, either to explain or prove them. That Truth is not Falſhood, that Light is not Darkneſs, that Eaſe is not Pain, are Propoſitions of this Kind. And is it not as ſelf-evident and certain, that Gratitude is not Ingratitude, that Kindneſs is not Cruelty, that Baſeneſs is not Honour, nor Falſehood Fidelity? Do not theſe Things convey abſolutely, and neceſſarily diſtinct Ideas? The Moment they are underſtood, do they not appear eternal and irreconcilable Contraries? There may indeed be ſome Caſes and Actions,

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concerning the Nature of which, how far they are right, and how far wrong, it may not be eaſy to determine. But the Reaſon of this is, not becauſe Men are ever at a Loſs to diſtinguiſh between theſe oppoſite Characters and Qualities of Right and Wrong, Good and Evil; but becauſe they ſometimes know not how properly to apply them; they do not underſtand ſome principal Circumſtances of the Actions themſelves, or the true Reaſons and Motives from whence they proceeded. Had they a perfect View of all theſe Things, they would as eaſily and certainly know whether to pronounce them good or bad, virtuous or vicious, as they would, whether to pronounce the Place where they themſelves were preſent, ſmall or great, lightſome or dark.

Was one to aſk the very plaineſt Man that ever lived, who had but common Underſtanding and Senſe, whether or no Light could ever be made Darkneſs, or Pleaſure made by any Being to become the ſame Thing as Pain; though he had never been converſant in the Schools of Philoſophy, yet he would not be at a Loſs to make the true Determination: He would immediately ſee, that as theſe Things are abſolutely contrary to one another in their very Natures, they could not be made ſo by, nor depend for their continuing what they are, on the Will and Pleaſure of any Being whatſoever; becauſe, as Darkneſs is the Negation, or want of Light, it is as impoſſible for any Being to make Darkneſs Light, as it is for him to make the ſame Thing to be and not to be at the ſame Time. And would he not ſee it to be an Equal Abſurdity to affirm, That the Difference between Virtue and Vice is merely accidental and arbitrary, and depends for its being, or continuing ſo, upon the Will and Pleaſure of another? Would he want Rules of Philoſophy

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and any long Train of Reaſoning to convince him, that no Being can make Impiety, Injuſtice, Intemperance, Uncharitableneſs, Lewdneſs and Cruelty, which neceſſarily, and, in their very Nature, imply the Negation and want of Piety, Juſtice, Temperance, Charity, Chaſtity, and Compaſſion, to become the ſelf ſame Things as theſe very Virtues, which they imply the utter want of?

And as this eſſential Difference between Good and Evil is as obvious and plain to the Minds of Men, as any firſt Principles poſſibly can be, ſo, I apprehend alſo, is the Reaſonableneſs and Fitneſs of practiſing Virtue in Oppoſition to Vice. No Man needs any Arguments to convince him, that Pleaſure is better than Pain, Sweet preferable to Bitter, and Light more comfortable than Darkneſs. Nature and Experience are infallible Rules of Judgment in theſe Things, and Men do almoſt inſtinctively chooſe the former as better than the latter, without any long Train of Reaſoning to perſuade and determine them, and without any Regard to the Command of a Superior, obliging them to ſuch a Choice. And I imagine, that Nature and Experience are equally ſure Guides in Things of a Moral Nature; and that it is as evident to all Men, who have not corrupted their Minds by bad Principles, evil Paſſions, and vicious Habits, that Moral Good is better in it ſelf, more amiable in its Nature, and more beneficial in all its Conſequences, than Moral Evil; and that when they judge impartially, they can no more help approving Virtue, in Oppoſition to Vice, than they can help approving Harmony in Oppoſition to Diſcord, or thoſe Things that give them Pleaſure preferably to thoſe that occaſion them Pain. As they need no Command or Law to enable them to diſcern the natural Difference

in theſe Things, they as little need them to help them to paſs the true Judgment concerning them, or to teach them which, upon the Whole, is fitteſt for them to chooſe and refuſe.

Nature it ſelf ſeems to have been friendly to Mankind in this Reſpect, which hath implanted a Kind of *conſtitutional Abhorrence of* Vice in their Minds, an *inſtinctive Prejudice* againſt it, and fear to commit it. And though they are too often led by the Strength of Appetite, and Warmth of Paſſion to do Evil, yet, in the Beginning, 'tis generally with great Reluctance and Oppoſition of Mind. Their better Judgments and Conſciences reclaim againſt their Practices, and reproach them for doing what they know they ought not to do. Vice is really a Kind of Art that requires ſome Length of Time to become Dextrous, and grow any conſiderable Proficients in. Men muſt firſt ſtruggle with themſelves, and uſe no ſmall Pains to ſtifle and ſuppreſs the natural Oppoſition of their Minds to it, before they can be tolerably eaſy in a vicious Courſe, and *commit Iniquity with Greedineſs* and Pleaſure. Frequent Cuſtom will undoubtedly gradually wear off that *natural Tenderneſs*, Reluctance, Modeſty, and Senſe of Honour, which the God of Nature hath implanted in Mens Minds, as a Guide to, and Check upon their Actions, as Reſtraints from Vice, and Motives to Virtue; and, by Degrees, ſo harden them in Sin, as that they may, at length, find little Uneaſineſs within themſelves upon account of it, and become inſenſible to all the Motives to Religion and Virtue. The ſame may alſo happen in natural Things. Men may ſo accuſtom themſelves *to Bitter*, as gradually to reconcile themſelves to it, and loſe the diſagreeable and unpleaſing Senſation of it. And though Poiſon be abhorrent to the Conſtitution and Frame, and Men naturally dread

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it as Fatal and Deſtructive; yet they may ſo habituate themſelves to it by frequent and long Practice, as to be able to take very conſiderable Quantities of it without Fear or Harm. But ſtill, as this doth not alter the original Natures or Qualities of Poiſon or Bitter, ſo neither doth Mens habituating themſelves to Wickedneſs and Vice, till they have loſt all Dread and Terror in the Commiſſion of it, in the leaſt change its Nature and Properties, render it one Jot the leſs evil in it ſelf, or leſs contrary to the natural uncorrupted Dictates of their Minds and Judgments.

Were we to crowd together into one Deſcription all the Vices of human Nature, and could we point out that ſingle Perſon to whom ſuch a dreadful Deſcription would agree; Would not all Men conſpire to look on him with Deteſtation, and unite in condemning ſo vile and execrable a Character? Would they not fly from him as a Monſter in his Kind, and all of them judge him abſolutely unworthy the Converſe of the whole Species? But why, if Virtue and Vice are mere arbitrary Diſtinctions, or if the Knowledge of this Difference lay really remote from the meaneſt Underſtandings, and was not to be diſcerned without a great deal of previous Inſtruction, Difficulty and Labour? Yea, with reſpect to particular Vices, did any one ever coolly think that the Being of a God was to be treated with Inſolence, Contempt and Scorn; that Curſes and Execrations are the proper Language of a Man, or that Perjury was ever Meritorious and Praiſe-worthy? Did Ingratitude ever appear to any Man in his Senſes, as an amiable and commendable Quality in its Nature, or as equally lovely and beautiful as a grateful Diſpoſition? Was Injuſtice ever thought or deſcribed as a real Excellency, or Treachery eſteemed preferable to true Honour, Falſehood to Truth,

or Cruelty to Compaſſion? Would any Man cheriſh in his Boſom, or harbour in his Family, an abandon'd Wretch, whom he knew would attempt the Chaſtity of his deareſt Relatives, otherwiſe injure the Perſons of his Family, or rob and plunder him of his Subſtance? Would any one chuſe to enter into Confidence with a Tale-bearer or Slanderer; or commit his Reputation to one, whom he ſuſpected or knew would betray and ruin it? Did any one ever think, that the Dignity of the human Form was increaſed by Drunkenneſs, or that Gluttony and Exceſs are real Ornaments in themſelves, or imply in them any Thing fit for, and worthy of Imitation? In a Word, there are no particular Vices that can be named, to which human Nature is incident, but thoſe who commit them will find certain Occaſions and Reaſons to cenſure them, and to determine on the ſide of the contrary Virtues. Whence comes it thus, that all Sorts of Men, of the moſt different Capacities and Sentiments as to moſt other Things, yet all concur, without Reaſoning or Delay, to paſs the ſame impartial Judgment on theſe; and chuſe to tranſact the moſt important Affairs of their Lives with Perſons of an eſtabliſhed Character, for Wiſdom, Piety, Honour, and univerſal Virtue, rather than with thoſe of an abandoned and profligate one? Whence comes it but from hence; That they do as certainly ſee, and can as eaſily and readily diſcern the Difference between Moral Good and Evil, and the Excellency of Virtue in Preference to Vice, as they do the natural Difference between Light and Darkneſs, and the Preferableneſs of Eaſe and Happineſs to Pain and Miſery?

Indeed Moral and Natural Good, *i. e.* Virtue and Happineſs, and Moral and Natural Evil, *i. e.* Vice and Miſery, are almoſt conſtantly and inſeparably

parably connected; and the unavoidable Consequences of Virtue and Vice, of which all Men are Judges, and which they cannot help discerning, plainly shew which is most reasonable and fit in it self, and best worthy their Approbation and Choice; Consequences that affect particular Persons in all the most valuable Concerns of their Being, and are not less visible in the greater and lesser Societies of Men themselves. So that as Virtue is, in the Consideration and Idea of it, much more lovely and commendable than Vice, so all external Appearances are intirely in favour of it, and powerfully lead Men to the Love and Practice of it.

And it would be thus were there no Laws at all actually injoining the Practice of Virtue. Mere Authority and Command add no intrinsick Excellency to the Things commanded, make them neither better nor worse than they were before, infer no Obligation in Reason to obey them, nor carry with them any Conviction to any reasonable Mind whatsoever. The Nature of Things is stubborn and obstinate, and will not bend to Power and Law, nor vary in the least in Obedience to the mere Motions of Will and Pleasure. Should all the Powers on Earth conspire together to enact, That Darkness should be Light, Pain Pleasure, Sickness Health, and Life Death, the Attempt would be as ridiculous as vain. Or should they ordain by Law, that Wickedness and Impiety, Intemperance and Debauchery, Covetousness and Rapine, Lust and Cruelty, Malice and Envy, should appear amiable and praise-worthy in every Man's Conscience and Judgment, should conduce to the Peace and Comfort, the Preservation, Health, Usefulness and Happiness of human Life, or tend to the good Order, Strength, Honour, and Welfare of Societies, in opposition to Justice and Equity, Charity and Benevolence, Temperance and Chastity; every

one immediately ſees that ſuch a Law would be abſurd and unnatural, could not accompliſh the intended Effect, and therefore could not poſſibly carry in it any Manner of reaſonable Obligation and Weight; and that therefore the making uſe of Power and Violence to enforce ſuch a Law muſt be tyrannical and wicked. So that 'tis obvious to the common Senſe of Mankind, that all unreaſonable Laws are in themſelves null and void, for this plain Reaſon, becauſe they are unreaſonable; and therefore it muſt be as evident to them, that the Reaſon of Things, or the Goodneſs and Fitneſs of what is commanded by Law, is the Ground and Foundation of every Law that Reaſon and Conſcience can oblige us to obey; and of Conſequence, that there are ſome Things good and fit in themſelves, and univerſally diſcerned and acknowledged to be ſuch, and therefore proper to be made the Subjects of Law, and enforced by Authority, becauſe reaſonable and fit, antecedent to it.

'Tis really thus even with reſpect to the Laws of God himſelf. That we ſhould love him, and offer our grateful Acknowledgments to him, as the Author of our Beings, the Giver of all our Mercies, and the only Object of our Happineſs, was evidently reaſonable and fit in its own Nature, antecedent to any direct Law of God injoining it; and is therefore made the Matter of a divine Law, becauſe it was originally, and in it ſelf proper and fit for God to command. In like manner Juſtice and Charity, and all the private and ſocial Virtues, have evidently a natural Reaſonableneſs in them, and do in their Practice neceſſarily and immutably tend to private and publick Happineſs; and therefore they are intrinſically and unalterably Good, and have in fact been known to be ſo by the Reaſon and Experience of all Men in all Ages and Nations, and are therefore originally fit to be inforced by the Autho-

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rity and Law of God. And with reſpect to all other Things whatſoever that have the Sanction of a divine Command, they have ſome real antecedent Fitneſs either *of Means or End*, that is the true Reaſon of their Injunction by God. So that the Reaſon of every good and wiſe Law is antecedent to the Law it ſelf; and as this Reaſon is only the real intrinſick Excellency, Suitableneſs and Fitneſs of the Thing commanded, this Excellency and Fitneſs muſt be generally plain and obvious, to thoſe who are to be governed by Law, is antecedent even to the Laws of God, independent, in this Reſpect, on his Will, and the eternal and invariable Rule and Meaſure of all its Determinations.

And as this is plain from Reaſon, ſo it is ſuppoſed, and plainly aſſerted in divine Revelation. Indeed unleſs this were the Caſe, Mankind would be no proper Judges of the Truth and Excellency of any real Revelation, nor of the Falſhood and Impoſture of a pretended and ſpurious one. Unleſs the Difference between Good and Evil is real and immutable, and the Diſcernment of it plain and eaſy, they would have no certain and fixed Rule what to receive and what to reject, but might as well ſubmit to and embrace the worſt Religion in the World, that had but a Pretence of Revelation, as the Beſt. But as no kind of external Evidence, and wonderful Appearance of Things can prove any Religion to be from God, that contains in it either Abſurdities or Falſhoods, that gives really diſhonourable and unworthy Repreſentations of the Perfections and Ways of God, that preſcribes ſuperſtitious and impious Methods of worſhipping him, or that teaches and countenances Immorality and Vice: It follows from hence, that it is by Marks of this kind that Men are to judge of every Kind of Religion that pretends to Inſpiration and divine Authority. But if there be either no Difference

rence in the Nature of Things themſelves, or if this Difference is ſo ſmall and uncertain, as that Mankind are not capable of diſcerning and underſtanding it, then they have no certain Rules by which to judge of the Nature and Deſign, the Truth or Falſhood of Revelation real or pretended, and therefore can be under no Obligations to give themſelves any Thought or Trouble whatſoever about it. But as this is not true in fact, ſo all the Revelations we have from God do ſuppoſe the contrary. Even *Moſes* could appeal to the People: *What Nation is there ſo great that hath Statutes and Judgments ſo righteous, as all this Law which I ſet before you this Day*[a]? And St. *Paul* tells us of the *Gentiles* themſelves, that *though they had no Law*, no Law by external Revelation from God, *yet they were a Law to themſelves*[b], viz. by the plain Dictates of their natural Reaſon and Conſciences; and that *they ſhewed that the Work of the Law was written in their Hearts*, as *their Conſciences bare them witneſs, and their Thoughts accuſed or excuſed one another*; it being evidently the Work and Buſineſs of a Law, to do what the Conſciences of the *Heathens* actually did, *viz.* to point out the Difference between Good and Evil, and to cenſure or juſtify Men according as they do either the one or the other. And with reſpect to Chriſtianity, that Rule of the Apoſtle holds univerſally good[c]: *Prove all Things, hold faſt that which is good*; A Precept that can have no other Reaſon and Fitneſs but this; that Good and Evil are eſſentially different, and that Mankind are abundantly capable of diſcerning, and making the proper Choice between them. And that they ſhould do ſo will fully appear from,

III. The third and laſt General, which is to ſhew you, that the confounding, and habitually diſ-

[a] Deut. iv. 8. [b] Rom. ii. 14. [c] 1 Theſ. v. 21.

disregarding this essential and immutable Difference of Things will be attended with the most pernicious and destructive Consequences. *Wo unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil.* This Wo is pronounced upon the corrupt and profligate *Jews* by the Prophet in the Name of God, and the Punishment contain'd in it is immediately after particularly described: [a] *As the Fire devoureth the Stubble, and the Flame consumeth the Chaff, so shall their Root be as Rottenness, and their Blossom shall go up as Dust. Therefore is the Anger of the Lord kindled against his People, and he hath stretched forth his Hand against them, and hath smitten them, and the Hills did tremble, and their Carcases were tore in the Midst of the Streets. And he will lift up an Ensign to the Nations from afar, they shall lay hold of the Prey, and shall carry it away, and none shall deliver it*, i. e. besides all the Judgments I have inflicted on them already, I will deliver them over into the Hands of their Enemies, and they shall carry them away with all their Treasures into a long and miserable Captivity.

If indeed we consider only the natural Consequences that do, more or less, necessarily and inseparably flow from an habitual Disregard to, and Contempt of the essential Differences between Moral Good and Evil, we shall find an immediate Punishment connected by the Constitution and Providence of God, with almost every kind of Immorality and Vice; and that with respect to particular Persons and Societies in general. As to Individuals, not to mention those [b] Uneasinesses and Fears of Mind, those inward Terrors and Reproaches of Conscience which are oftentimes the sad Effects of Sin; there

[a] Ver. 24, 25 26, 29.

[b] At vero scelerum in homines atq; impietatum nulla expiatio est. Itaque pœnas luunt, non tam judiciis, quæ quondam nusquam erant, hodie multifariam nulla sunt, ut sint tamen, persæpe falsa sunt, sed angore conscientiæ, fraudisque cruciatu. Cicer. de leg. l. 1. c. 14.

are many other Inconveniencies flowing from it, which are evident Arguments of the divine Disapprobation, and certainly demonstrate the Folly and Mischief of Vice, and that *to depart from Evil is the truest Understanding*. Every one knows, for there are ten Thousand Instances in almost every Age and Nation to prove it, that all Indulgences, contrary to the Rules and Obligations of Moral Virtue, have a natural and direct Tendency to destroy the Vigor of Mens reasonable Powers, to dissipate and waste their worldly Substance, and to reduce them to Poverty and Distress. They lessen Mens Reputation and good Character in the World, and by rendering them contemptible, and often infamous, deprive them of many valuable Opportunities of Success, and greatly contract their Abilities for Usefulness. They weaken and disorder their Constitutions, prepare their Bodies for the most violent Distempers, subject them to the most grievous Pains, and often end in Bitterness and Death.

Nor are these bad Consequences less visible in Societies themselves, than in private Persons. When the Distinctions between Good and Evil are generally disregarded, and the Manners of a Nation become almost universally profligate; the Honour and Credit of a People must sink in proportion, their Reputation, Weight and Influence abroad must lessen, their Trade and Commerce must decay, the publick Strength be enervated, the Force and Authority of Law and Government become weak and impotent, Disorder and Confusion spring up in the Room of them, Liberty, that greatest of all earthly Blessings, grow more and more precarious, Persons of all Ranks and Degrees become venal and servile, and prepare the Way for utter Ruin and Dissolution. To these Things have been owing the Fall of the greatest Empires and King-

doms, that have been the moſt powerful and famous in the World, as hath been frequently obſerved with great Juſtice and Truth by thoſe who have tranſmitted the Hiſtories of them down to us. Whereas whilſt Nations have continued virtuous, they have generally continued powerful and ſtrong; whilſt they have had no internal Symptoms of Weakneſs and Diſſolution, they have had leſs to fear from any external Violence, and been capable of exerting themſelves with that Reſolution and Vigor, which hath been neceſſary to their Security and Preſervation; ſo that was nothing elſe to be regarded but the natural Tendencies of Things, we might well pronounce a *Wo* to that People, who *put Good for Evil, and Evil for Good.*

But beſides this, ſurely there is a God that governs the World, and whoſe Providence is not wholly inattentive to and regardleſs of the Moral State and Character of Nations: A God to whom, from the incorruptible Rectitude and Purity of his Nature, a general Corruption of Manners muſt be highly diſpleaſing, and who can never be ſuppoſed to look with a very favourable Regard upon a People, who have loſt all Senſe of Moral Good and Evil, and are become univerſally Degenerate from all the original Principles and plaineſt Rules of Moral Virtue. As he hath all the Powers of Nature abſolutely under his Controul, and can make the elementary World ſubſervient to the Purpoſes of his Providence, I ſee no Abſurdity in ſuppoſing, what Revelation ſeems very plainly to point out, that he may, and will, when the Sins of any People make it neceſſary, [1] *Curſe them in the City and the Field*, in *their Baſket and in their Store*; *in the Fruit of their Body and the Fruit of their Land, the Increaſe of their Kine, and the Flocks of their Sheep*; *make the Peſtilence cleave to them till it hath conſumed them*;

[1] Deut. xxviii. 16, 17, 18, 21.

[m] *the Heavens over them to become as Braſs, and the Earth under them to be as Iron; cauſe them to be ſmitten before their Enemies,* [n] *and Strangers to get above them very high,* ſo that they ſhall not be the *Head but the Tail of the Nations*; or ſend amongſt them [o] *a new King who ſhall not know* Joſeph, and who *ſhall ſet over the People cruel Taſk-Maſters, to afflict them with their Burthens.* Theſe and the like Calamities have befallen Nations as the Puniſhments of an univerſal Degeneracy and Corruption of Manners, and I think theſe are the Evils they have in ſuch Circumſtances a great deal of Reaſon always to fear, if there be a Providence that really regards the Affairs of Mankind, and is concerned to maintain the Intereſt of Religion and Virtue in the World. And thus have I largely ſpoken to the ſeveral Things contained in this Paſſage of the inſpired Prophet: I ſhall now conclude all with ſome ſuitable Inferences.

1. We may ſee the great Wiſdom of God, and his Goodneſs to Mankind, in making thoſe Things, which are of the greateſt Importance to them, and in which their Duty and Happineſs is moſt directly and eſſentially concerned, to be ſo exceeding evident and plain to them, as that if they will but uſe their Underſtandings, they may as plainly diſtinguiſh and diſcern them, as they can any ſenſible Objects with their Eyes, or ſuch Things as are pleaſant and wholeſome by their Taſte and Palate.

2. We may infer from what hath been ſaid, how ſtrong and unchangeable all Mens Obligations are to the Practice of Religion and Virtue; as unchangeable as the very Nature and Reaſon of Things, and as their Inclinations are to purſue Plea-

[m] Deut. xxviii. 23, 25. [n] Ver. 43, 44.
[o] Exod. i. 8, 11.

Pleaſure before Pain, and to embrace Happineſs in preference to Miſery.

3. We may infer the great Folly and Abſurdity of Mens giving favourable Names to Vice, and endeavouring to ſcreen the Malignity and Deformity of it by the honourable Appellations of Virtue. Vice is ſo very ſhameful and odious a Thing, as that, one would hope, there are but comparatively few arrived to that Pitch of Inſenſibility and Impudence, as openly to glory in the Thing it ſelf, and chuſe to be accounted remarkable for Impiety and Wickedneſs. And becauſe oftentimes Mens natural Conſciences would cenſure and render them extremely uneaſy, if they allowed themſelves in the habitual Practice of Crimes that would admit of no poſſible Excuſe; they endeavour to palliate their Faults, and bring them, as near as they can, to real Virtues. Thus ſome Men, who are *ſordidly penurious* and covetous, would fain have it all paſs for *Frugality*, and the commendable Care of their Families and Friends. Revelling and *Drunkenneſs* is changed into *good Nature and Fellowſhip*. *Leudneſs* wears the genteel Name of *Gallantry* and Politeneſs. *Ambition* and Envy cover their Deformity, and become reputable and popular, by putting on the Garb of Merit and *Patriotiſm*. *Cenſure* and Reproach, Reviling and Scandal, put off their Fury Dreſs, and make their Appearance in the ſacred Habit of *Sanctity and Zeal*. Thus changed, not in Nature, but Appearance and Name, Vice ſeems to them a leſs formidable and odious Thing, and is ſometimes embraced and harboured as an heavenly Virtue. But is not ſuch a Conduct an Argument of the extremeſt Folly? Can any imagine, that this thin and ſhameleſs Cover can conceal their true Character from the all-knowing God? Or, that by miſcalling Vice, they can tranform it into

a real Perfection, and thus confound the unalterable Nature and Differences of Things? Should Satan dreſs himſelf like an Angel of Light, he would be Satan ſtill; his Nature would continue the ſame, though his Appearance was altered; and his Qualities be truly deviliſh under the moſt radiant Dreſs of celeſtial Glory. In like Manner, Vice can never loſe its Nature or Qualities, it will ſtill be Vice, a Contrariety to God and his Laws, to the Truth, and Reaſon, and immutable Nature of Things, and to the true Honour and Happineſs of Men, palliate it as much as you pleaſe, and call it by whatever favourable Names you will. Harbour it in your Breaſts and it will defile you. Indulge it in your Lives and it will ſink you under ſubſtantial Guilt. Compare it with the Rule of Reaſon, and the Law of God, and it will immediately appear in its true Deformity. Think of it in its Conſequences, and the dreadful Scene that will immediately preſent it ſelf, will be Horror and Deſpair. Let us therefore return to the original Truth and Simplicity of Things; nor deceive our ſelves by miſrepreſenting or overlooking our Vices and Follies. Let Covetouſneſs be, in every Shape, looked on as a ſordid Meanneſs, unworthy a Man. Let Revelling and Drunkenneſs no longer appear in the innocent Garb of good Nature. They are a Shame and Reproach to human Nature, and degrade Men ſometimes into ſomething meaner than Brutes, and ſometimes transform them into Furies and Devils. Let Leudneſs and Debauchery ever be accounted, what they really are in the Sight of God, and all reaſonable Men, as lawleſs and cruel Triumphs over ruin'd Modeſty, injur'd Virtue, and proſtituted Honour and Innocence. Let rank Ambition no longer conceal its Deformity under the ſacred Cover of Patriotiſm and publick Spirit; but ever be deteſted as an uneaſy,

uneasy, restless, treacherous, faithless, impatient, unsatiable, servile, mercenary, fawning, imperious Monster. Let Scandal, Reproach, Censoriousness, and rash Judgment ever be abhorred, as certain Proofs of a distemper'd, envious, and bigotted Mind, and as sure Marks, not of a religious, but of an enthusiastick and superstitious Zeal; that hath neither Knowledge to enliven it, nor Reason, Humanity, or Conscience to direct it. In a Word; let us faithfully and honestly attend to the Reason of Things, and the Representations given of them in divine Revelation; and not judge of them by Passion, Appetite, and Prejudice; or by false, selfish, and partial Views of them. Thus shall we learn that Fear and Abhorrence of Vice, which is essentially necessary to preserve us uncorrupted amidst the Temptations of an ensnaring World, and grow into that fixed and habitual Approbation of true Piety and Virtue, which is necessary to the Honour and Comfort of the present Life, and to secure us the Happiness of a better.

4. We may infer, that all wise and reasonable Methods of reforming the Morals, and correcting the Vices of Mankind, are greatly serviceable, and directly conduce to the Peace and Welfare of civil Society. This is as evident, as that there is any real Difference between Virtue and Vice, and that Vice is prejudicial to the Interests of Mankind, and that by a Regard to Virtue alone the Happiness of Individuals, and by consequence the Welfare of Nations can be promoted and maintained. If we consider the Nature and manifest Tendency of the Providence and Moral Government of God, we shall find it conducted by such Methods as make it plainly appear, that the great Design of it is to encourage Piety and Moral Goodness, and to discountenance and banish from amongst Mankind,

kind, all Sorts of Immorality and Vice. Publick Prosperity is the publick Approbation he gives of publick Virtue, and an Encouragement to Nations to persevere therein; and which we may observe, seldom or ever wholly fails them, till they grow intirely degenerate, and too obstinately vicious to be recovered and reformed. Nor ought we to consider national Calamities in any other View, than as Instances of the Displeasure of God against the abounding Corruptions of the Age in which they are inflicted; and when such Calamities have involved any People in an intire and universal Destruction, they ought to be regarded as Monuments of the divine Vengeance, and loud Calls to Repentance and Reformation; especially when the Causes of their Ruin are but too visible, and the Foundation of it plainly laid in an universal Dissolution and Corruption of Manners. And with Regard to all those peculiar Revelations, which have been introduced into the World, by the Order, and under the Conduct of Providence, the evident Intention of them hath been, to settle in Mens Minds this original and immutable Difference between Good and Evil, and by proper Motives and Arguments to establish the Practice of substantial Virtue, in Opposition to Ignorance, Superstition and Vice. So that God himself may be looked on under the Character of *the great Reformer* of Mankind, and as endeavouring to promote their Happiness by Methods discouraging their Vices, and exciting them to the Love and Practice of universal Virtue. And therefore such who endeavour, by wise and equitable Methods, to carry on this great and benevolent Design, act upon the Plan of the divine Government, help to carry on the Purposes of God's all wise Providence, and deserve to be esteemed as the truest Friends to the publick Welfare and Prosperity.

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In like Manner the great Design of our blessed Saviour's coming into the World, was its Reformation from that Ignorance, Idolatry and Vice that universally abounded amongst Mankind, to recover to their Minds the lost Principles of Religion and Virtue, and to engage them *to do Justice, and love Mercy, and walk humbly with God*, by the most suitable and effectual Methods. 'Tis true, as he came not to erect an earthly Kingdom, he did not enforce any of the Moral Precepts he delivered, by any temporal Terrors or Encouragements; nor order his Religion to be propagated by any of those Methods of Force and Violence, that are more or less necessary to curb the Vices, and preserve the Honour and Peace of civil Society. As he had Authority to dictate to the Consciences of Men, and intended that his Doctrines should purify their Hearts as well as amend their Practice; he made Use of Methods that were immediately suited to answer this great Design. He became a Preacher of Righteousness; he wrought many Miracles, to awaken the Attention of Men to the Things he taught; the Doctrines he delivered were either obvious Truths, which carried their own Conviction to all reasonable Minds, or those which were in their Nature perfectly consistent with such Truths, and had the most substantial Evidence that was necessary to confirm them; the Motives and Arguments with which he enforced them, were all derived from the Realities of a Future State, from the Certainty and Awfulness of a Judgment to come, and the immutable Consequences of that Judgment, in the Rewards and Punishments that are respectively to await the Actions of Men in the present Life, according as they have been, either *Good or Evil*. This was truly laying *the Ax to the Root*, striking at the very Foundations of Vice, opening the

Mind it ſelf for the Entrance of Religion in all its genuine Principles, and teaching Men the Practice of real Virtue, upon the ſure Foundations of Reaſon and Conſcience.

And after the perſonal Miniſtry of our bleſſed Lord was at an End, he ſent out his Apoſtles into the World to carry on the ſame excellent and neceſſary Work, the Reformation and Amendment of Mankind. They were inveſted with the honourable Character of the Meſſengers and *Ambaſſadors of God*, and gave the proper Credentials of their heavenly Miſſion: And the End of their Embaſſy was, not to enrich and aggrandize themſelves, and carry on the low Views of ſecular Power and Wealth; but to *beſeech* and perſuade Men *to become reconciled to God*, by *denying all Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and living ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in the preſent evil World*, upon the ſame Motives, and by the ſame Kind of Arguments, that were made Uſe of by our Lord himſelf; in whoſe Name, and by whoſe Authority, they preached to Mankind. So that 'tis your Honour, Gentlemen, who have engaged in the good Work of reforming others, to have, in ſome Reſpect, the Almighty God himſelf as the Head of your Societies, the Son of God as your proper Patron and Advocate, and the holy Prophets and Apoſtles as your Examples and Companions in this neceſſary and uſeful Service.

Nor can I imagine that there can be any other valuable End of a ſtanding Miniſtry in the Chriſtian Church, than to carry on the ſame Deſign, nor that it can be worth any Nation's while, to ſupport and maintain it with any other View whatſoever. A vicious Miniſtry is certainly a very great Reproach, Misfortune, and Burden to a Nation. Their Examples cannot fail of ſpreading a very deep and wide Corruption, and preventing

the Influence of their beſt Inſtructions, as well as hindring the Succeſs of the wiſeſt and moſt vigorous Endeavours in others to diſcountenance and check the Progreſs of Immorality and Vice. The Nature of their Office requires them to be Patterns of Religion and univerſal Virtue; and they then become *the true Succeſſors* of the Apoſtles, when they *give no Offence in any Thing, that the Miniſtry be not blamed*; when *they approve themſelves as the Miniſters of God, by Pureneſs, by Knowledge, by Long-ſuffering, by Kindneſs, by Love unfeigned, by the Word of Truth, and by the Armour of Righteouſneſs, on the right Hand and on the left* [a]. And when to this amiable and unblameable Character, they add Diligence and Fidelity in their Office, and endeavour, in publick and private Life, by proper Exhortations, Admonitions and Inſtructions, to ſpread Knowledge, Righteouſneſs, Peace and Charity, to reclaim the Vicious, to confirm the Unreſolved, and eſtabliſh honeſt and well diſpoſed Minds in their regard to Religion and Virtue; then they are truly *Fellow-labourers with God* and Chriſt, in that moſt excellent and neceſſary Work of reforming and ſaving Mankind. They then become the greateſt Bleſſings to civil Society, and deſerve to be *very highly reſpected for their Works ſake.*

But how neceſſary and uſeful ſoever a prudent, religious, and virtuous Miniſtry may, in ſome Reſpects be, to carry on this Deſign, yet, 'tis not to be expected, that Religion and Virtue will ever gain any great Ground againſt Irreligion and Vice, without other Methods co-operating to the ſame Purpoſe; and particularly unleſs a due Regard be ſhewn to theſe Things by private Perſons, and a proper Care be taken by Parents and Maſters of Families, in the Education and In-

[a] 2 Cor. vi. 3, 4, 6, 7.

ſtruction of thoſe who are under their Care. As Societies for Reformation of Manners, *Actions only*, and *not Principles*, come under your Cognizance and Obſervation. But how can you expect that the Actions of Men ſhould be regulated by the Rules of Virtue, unleſs the neceſſary Foundation be laid in proper Principles of Truth and Righteouſneſs? And towards this you may very much contribute theſe two Ways; by diſtributing amongſt the lower and poorer Part of the reſpective Pariſhes and Wards where you live, little and plain Books, containing the uncontroverted Principles of Chriſtianity, Accounts of, and Exhortations to Moral Virtue, and Diſſuaſives and Motives from the Practice of every Vice. This I find hath been the commendable Practice of your Societies; which have given away at their own Charge, *Four hundred and forty four Thouſand, ſeven hundred and fifty Treatiſes* of this Kind; which, 'tis reaſonable to hope, may do ſome good, even ſometimes where perſonal Correction alone, and Puniſhment by the Laws would prove altogether inſufficient.

The other Way of promoting the Intereſt of Virtue and Religion, and of carrying on that Reformation of Manners you aim at, and which indeed is eſſentially Neceſſary to it, is by acting a Faithful and Chriſtian Part in your own Conduct and Families. Should any of you, who act as the Reformers of others, be guilty of thoſe Immoralities you endeavour to puniſh in them, how indecent, how inconſiſtent would it appear? Or ſhould you be negligent of the Morals of your own Houſholds and Families, whilſt you ſeek to puniſh Vice and Wickedneſs abroad in thoſe of others, would you not be liable to deſerved Cenſure and Reproach? Give me leave to remind you, that the Members of your reſpective Houſes, both Children and Servants,

vants, are committed by the Providence of God to your Inſpection and Care, and that whatever Evil they learn or practiſe whilſt under your Roof, through any criminal Neglect of Duty in you, or through the Influence of your Example leading them to the Commiſſion of it, you are ſo far Sharers in, and chargeable with their Guilt.

As Heads of Families, you ſhould be Examples of a ſincere and unaffected Piety, and Patterns of every Thing that is Virtuous and Praiſe-worthy; and when 'tis conſidered that ſocial Virtue it ſelf can't long ſubſiſt, where Piety to God is habitually neglected, you will not, I hope, take it amiſs, or think it foreign to the Purpoſe of your preſent Meeting, if I earneſtly beſeech you, by your Regards for the Welfare of your own Families, and the Succeſs of your Endeavours for the Reformation of others; that you lead your Houſeholds into that Fear of God, which is the ſureſt Preſervative from the Corruptions of a wicked World, by a ſerious Regard to, and Practice of all thoſe Duties of Religion, which, as the Governors of Families, are incumbent on you: I mean by having your proper Times for calling them to the Devotion of Prayer, and your Seaſons for inſtructing them your ſelves, or by the Aſſiſtance of proper Books, in the Principles and Duties of the Chriſtian Life.

I am perſwaded you your ſelves muſt think thoſe Methods are likely to be attended with many valuable Effects, upon the Minds and Conduct of thoſe under your Care. And what is there that ſhould hinder your diſcharging a good Conſcience in this reſpect? Can it be imagined that your Servants will ever prove faithful to you, and induſtrious in their Stations, that have never been taught to act from Principles of Reverence to, and Faith and Hope in God? Will the Seeds

of

of Religion and Virtue ever thrive and grow in the Minds of your Children, if not cultivated by your Care? Can you expect your Families should become well regulated and orderly Societies, if you absent your selves from the Government of them; if every Evening of your Lives is to be spent abroad in publick Houses, in the Amusements of Cards, of Wine, and Company; and if you retire almost every Sunday in the Year into the Country, negligent of, and separated from those, who ought always to be under your Inspection, and who are liable to be corrupted and ruined the Moment they are left free from Controul, and given up to their own Management, Appetites and Passions?

Forgive me, if I express the greater Concern on this Head, upon account of the many Methods that are daily taking to debauch the Principles, and corrupt the Manners of our Youth, to inspire them with a Love of Diversion and Pleasure, to lead them into excessive Expences, and costly Luxuries, and, in a Word, to prejudice them, not only against the Principles of Religion, but the plain Duties and Virtues of social Life. As if the Entertainments of the *Theatre* were not frequent, expensive and near enough to us, and sufficient Recreations from the Toil of Business; as if these were not enough to *kill the Time*, to inspire Emulation of Dress, to teach us how to neglect the Affairs of Trade and Commerce, and to expend the Overplus of our Fortunes, that should be laid out in Works of Charity and Goodness; we have introduced other Diversions, and the Evenings of our Winter Season is almost one continued Scene of Rejoicing and Mirth; where every Heart feels the Charms of Musick, and every Care of Life, and Thought of Business, is hushed, beguiled, and ravished away by the transporting Sounds

Sounds of Harmony; like *Iſrael* of old, when his Vices had almoſt brought him to his final Ruin: [a] *The Harp, and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine, are in their Feaſts: But they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither conſider the Operation of his Hands.* And whilſt the City abounds with theſe polite Diverſions, the Country round us grows Brilliant and Gay, and ſmiles with crowded Aſſemblies; where *faſhionable Games* become the general Diverſion, and where no Expences are ſpared to brighten up and perfect the Entertainment. Yea, that nothing may be wanting for our Gratification, for we are become a *Nation of Pleaſure*, and that our Families and Houſes may inſpire us with an early Love of gay Amuſements, and what is the Conſequence of it, an Averſion to ſo unpolite a Thing as Buſineſs; the Cards are become the general Amuſement after the Repaſt of Dinner, and are grown into ſo very ſerious and important a Concern as to ſhut out almoſt all other Affairs, and as often to become our Employment and Study, even until the Midnight Watches overtake us.

I am afraid I ſhall betray my own Want of Taſte and Politeneſs, by mentioning theſe Particulars, as tending to corrupt the Manners, and deſtroy the Diligence, Integrity, and Virtue of the Nation. But I am not ſolicitous on this Account, nor am I afraid to affirm, that the general Love and Purſuit of Diverſions, is inconſiſtent with the Proſperity of Trade and Commerce; and that a Trading City hath ſcarce any Thing to fear ſo much, or that can prove more prejudicial to her Honour and Proſperity, than a prevailing Luxury, and growing Inclination to, and Taſte of Pleaſure. It enervates the Mind, it is the Bane of Induſtry, it is the Mother of Expence and Pro-

[a] Iſa. v. 12.

Profuſeneſs, and the principal Source of thoſe Failures in Buſineſs, that oftentimes involve many Families in Deſtruction [t]. And therefore, though theſe and the like Entertainments may not be ſtrictly criminal in themſelves, nor do I reproach them as ſuch, yet when they grow into Habits, are in conſtant Uſe, and become the Buſineſs inſtead of the ſeldom Amuſements of Life, as they ought to be; they then become of very dangerous Conſequence, and can't be too carefully provoided againſt by thoſe who are hearty Friends to the Liberty, Virtue, and Proſperity of the Nation.

The Guarding the Minds of our Children by early Inſtruction, againſt all Allurements to ſuch a ſenſual Kind of Life, and the Leading them into the Love and Practice of Temperance, Frugality, Induſtry, and the like Virtues, by our own Behaviour, and if it could be, even upon Principles of Piety towards God, is, I think, our Duty and our Intereſt; and unleſs a more general Care be taken by Parents and Maſters in this reſpect of their Families, your Societies can be of comparatively little Service. For though you may bring particular Offenders to ſome corporal Puniſhments, this will not always reform them, much leſs prevent the Infection of Vice in others.

However, 'tis good to keep Vice and Immorality always under Terror; otherwiſe they would exceed all Bounds, and ſoon ſpread an univerſal Confuſion and Deſtruction. This is one great End of the Formation of civil Society, *viz.* to lay a Reſtraint upon the Paſſions and Appetites of

[t] Archytas, nullam capitaliorem peſtem, quam corporis voluptatem hominibus dicebat, a natura datam. Cumque homini ſive natura, ſive quis Deus nihil mente præſtabilius dediſſet, huic divino muneri ac dono nihil eſſe tam inimicum, quam voluptatem; ſi quidem ea, cum major eſſet atque longior, omne animi lumen extingueret. Cicer. de Senect. c. 12.

of bad Men, and that others may live in Peace and Safety under the Security of the common Protection. All the wiſeſt and beſt Laws of Society, ſuppoſe the eſſential Difference between Moral Good and Evil, and the Neceſſity of an externally virtuous Behaviour to the general Safety and Happineſs; invariably rendring Vice penal, and being in their Nature calculated for the Encouragement and Security of the Righteous and Good. And if theſe Laws, inflicting proper Puniſhments upon ſuch Immoralities as are Breaches of the publick Peace, be equitable and juſt, ſurely the Execution of them muſt be prudent and neceſſary; and your Societies, as far as prudently managed, be of real Uſe and Benefit to the Nation; becauſe they *are in aid* of the Laws themſelves, and ſerviceable to promote the Ends of civil Government.

If the ſcandalous Vices of profligate Men ought, in reaſon, to go unpuniſhed, to what End are the national Laws, and the Proclamations of our beſt Princes, againſt them? If they ought not to go without Cenſure, becauſe the permitting them would be inconſiſtent with the publick Peace, our Laws ought to have their Authority maintained, and the Vigour of them kept up. And therefore Information againſt notorious Offenders, becomes the Duty of a good Citizen, and ſhould be ſupported by wiſe and faithful Magiſtrates. The Support of publick Virtue ſhould be the Concern of every Man; and may Proſperity for ever attend thoſe Societies, whoſe Aim and Endeavour it is, by juſt, and legal, and honourable Methods, to maintain it. The Welfare of our Country at home, the Influence and Honour of it abroad, the Succeſs of Trade, and our Security in poſſeſſing what we have, the Dignity of Magiſtracy, and the Peace of Government, the Comfort of our Families, the

Safety of our Children, and the Fidelity of our Servants; all depend, in a great Measure, upon keeping up the Influence, and maintaining the Credit of our Laws. These, as far as they are founded in Equity, are to be the Rules of all your Proceedings, Informations, and Prosecutions; and whilst you keep within these Bounds, act upon Principles of publick Good, and are impartial, according to your Power and Opportunities, in discountenancing and suppressing those Enormities that are a Scandal to the Nation, and which, if suffered to go with Impunity, must be attended with the most mischievous Consequences; you deserve well of the Society you are Members of; and merit the general Protection and Encouragement.

You must indeed expect manifold Reproaches on this Account. Vice is, in its Nature, foul mouth'd, and impatient of Restraint; and cannot but hate those that would set Bounds to its insolent, and injurious Practices. But all Censures from this Quarter may be the more easily born by Men, who have the Testimony of a good Conscience, that they have no private Views of Advantage, no Party Designs of Interest and Power to carry on; but the Honour and Interest of the Nation in general; and, if it may be, the bringing Offenders themselves to a better Temper and Behaviour. Punishment, indeed, is an ungrateful Thing, where it can be well avoided; and a generous Mind would not chuse to bring others under the publick Censure of the Laws. But if the Peace of Societies, the maintaining our Liberties, and the Safety and Honour of our Families cannot be secured without it; deserved Punishments, in such Case, are Instances of Mercy and Justice to others, however grievous they may be to Offenders themselves. Let them forbear their Injuries

ries to civil Government and Society, your Profecutions will be immediately at an End. Till then, Society owes them no Protection, and they ought not to enjoy the common Privileges of it, who endeavour to diſturb its Peace, and weaken its Security. Go on then, by all wiſe and juſtifiable Methods, to render Vice infamous and uneaſy to them, who will no otherwiſe be kept within the Bounds of Moderation; keep it, if poſſible, out of your own Families, and let no deſerved Blemiſh lie upon your own Characters and Conduct. Thus will you, both in publick and private Life, act a friendly and uſeful Part to Society, be happy in the Security and Peace of your own Minds, and deſerve, what I ſincerely wiſh you, the Eſteem of all good Men; and what is of much greater Conſequence and Value, the Approbation of God himſelf; To whom be Dominion, Praiſe and Glory, by Chriſt Jeſus, World without End. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

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